



# Branching Out

Creating Connections to End Sexual Violence

Fall 2017

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## ***SAS and SAKI***

By Samantha Sustachek



At some point in recent years, you have likely heard mention in the news of untested sexual assault kits (SAKs) in Wisconsin and across the country. These kits, potential evidence collected during forensic exams of sexual assault victims, have gone unsubmitted and untested due to a lack of resources and personnel, misunderstanding of crime lab acceptance policies, outdated investigation procedures, and a variety of other reasons. Something needed to happen to address these issues and the current backlog of kits, and to prevent future backlogs from occurring. Thus the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) was born to provide funding through a competitive grant program, which aims to create a coordinated community response that ensures just resolution to sexual assault cases through (1) a comprehensive and victim-centered approach, (2) jurisdictional capacity building to prevent high numbers of unsubmitted SAKs in the future, and (3) supporting the investigation and prosecution of cases for which SAKs were previously unsubmitted.

Here in Wisconsin, SAKI awarded a grant to the Department of Justice to pay for unsubmitted SAK testing, create a multidisciplinary team to inventory and track SAKs, provide training and technical assistance, and enhance services and notifications to victims of sexual assault. In turn, the Wisconsin DOJ announced earlier this summer that it would be accepting applications for funding from sexual assault service providers in the Wisconsin counties with the highest number of unsubmitted SAKs. Racine County was one of those counties, and Sexual Assault Services (SAS) applied for and was awarded a SAKI grant.

This grant began on July 1, 2017 and will provide SAS with funding for a variety of activities over the next two years. With the support of SAKI, SAS has been able to increase staff time to provide more direct service to survivors. We do not yet know what the repercussions will be when results begin to come in from previously unsubmitted and untested SAKs, but we suspect that the demand for supportive services for survivors may increase. SAS is now ready to meet that need, as well as aid law enforcement in notifying victims when a previously unsubmitted SAK is tested and returns a DNA hit. The SAKI grant has also allowed SAS to pay for advertising of program services for the first time in many



years. One eye-catching ad is already running on the side of a Racine city bus, and another will soon follow when a second bus becomes available. The ad focuses on publicizing

Cont. on page 4

### Inside This Issue

Legislative Update & Program Stats.....	Page 2
Rompiendo la Barrera & Making a Difference..	Page 3
Family Advocate.....	Page 4
Face to Face.....	Page 5



# Legislative Update

By Vicki Biehn

## *Victim Notification Protocols and Untested Sexual Assault Kits*

Wisconsin has about 6,400 untested sexual assault kits across the state, and the state is currently working to have as many tested as possible in order to hold offenders accountable, to create safer communities, and so sexual assault survivors can potentially find some justice. The Wisconsin Department of Justice has created a website to provide information about these untested kits ([wisaki.doj.wi.gov](http://wisaki.doj.wi.gov)).

The Wisconsin Attorney General's Sexual Assault Response Team (AG SART) Victim Notification sub-committee is in the process of finalizing the suggested protocols for handling victim notification on these previously untested sexual assault kits. This group reviewed protocols from other jurisdictions and talked with the Joyful Heart Foundation to guide its creation of these protocols. However, group members quickly realized that there is no perfect protocol, because of the possible and likely chance for re-traumatization of survivors. The group has done its best to create procedures with the hope that each county system will take great care in order to reduce this re-traumatization of survivors.

Survivors can learn about their previously untested sexual assault kits in two ways. The first is the opt-in notification, whereby survivors contact authorities to find out about their kits. A media campaign called *By Your Side* reached out to survivors across the state to inform them of this opt-in option. Survivors can call a toll-free number (1-800-446-6564) or email [info@byyoursidewi.org](mailto:info@byyoursidewi.org) to find out the status of their sexual assault kits.

The second way survivors can learn about their sexual assault kits is through active outreach notification, whereby authorities contact survivors regarding their newly tested kits. If there is information to share with a survivor after her/his kit has been tested, a team of local experts review the details of the case and determine the next steps for notification. The AG SART Victim Notification sub-committee suggests that each county develop a team that will make case by case decisions for each of the kits in its county. The sub-committee feels that this team should consist minimally of a prosecutor, a law enforcement officer, a community based advocate, and a medical forensic professional. The sub-committee further suggests that a law enforcement officer and a community based advocate contact the survivor with the information about her/his previously untested kit.

The guiding principles at the center of this protocol are that all decisions and interactions with survivors will be victim-centered and trauma-informed, that the needs and well-being of the survivors are of utmost concern, and that addressing them must be a collective effort. The AG SART Victim Notification sub-committee is asking that the following considerations be respected with each victim notification:

1. Attend to the survivor's emotional safety, as well as her/his physical safety.
2. Strengthen the survivor's capacity to recover from the traumatic effects of sexual abuse/violation by providing ongoing information, resources, services, support, and relevant contacts.
3. Educate survivors, service providers, and the general community about the impact of trauma on survivors' health and well-being.
4. Respect the survivor's confidentiality and privacy.
5. Empower the survivor by giving her/him choices about if, when, and how she/he becomes engaged in the system.
6. Respect the survivor's choice not to engage.

The protocol contains many other suggestions outlining when survivors will be contacted, how to contact survivors, issues to consider when contacting survivors, how staff conducting notification shall be trained, etc., but perhaps the most important step in the protocol is a sincere apology to each survivor for the system's failure to test her/his kit previously.

If you have any further questions or would like a complete copy of the final protocol, please contact Vicki Biehn at 262-619-1634 or [vbiehn@lsswis.org](mailto:vbiehn@lsswis.org).

—Vicki



## SAS Program Statistics January—June 2017

Crisis Line Calls.....	57
Racine Hospital Visits.....	44
Burlington Hospital Visits.....	7
Legal Advocacy Sessions.....	0
New Counseling Clients.....	21
Counseling Sessions.....	383
Support Group Sessions.....	7
Community Presentations.....	45
CAC Appointments.....	80



# Rompiendo la Barrera

*Breaking the Barrier*

By Annabell Bustillos

As the Bilingual Outreach Advocate, I know that there is a connection between sexual violence, immigration, reporting to authorities and the work that we do here at Sexual Assault Services of LSS. At this time, any topic surrounding immigration is one that can be politically charged and for that reason I would like to state that I have no intention of expressing any views for, or against, any political view on immigration. The purpose of this article is to share some information regarding the fear surrounding immigration status and reporting.

On May 18th, seven national organizations that work to end domestic violence and sexual assault released the results of the 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors. These organizations sent a survey out to the field from April 12 to 25, 2017, asking for feedback from advocates and attorneys who work with survivors. A total of 715 victim advocates and attorneys in 46 states and the District of Columbia completed the survey. Through this survey advocates and attorneys reported how changing immigration policies affect the concerns of service providers and immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The survey shows that 78 percent of advocates reported that immigrant survivors expressed concerns about contacting police. One advocate stated, "Survivors are concerned that they will be detained if they make a police report or call 911. A 16 year old survivor attempted suicide because she was concerned that her offender would report her and her family to ICE." This is a very serious fear among this community nationally, and I have also felt concern locally. Clients have asked me if there are organizations that can go pay parking tickets for individuals that are afraid of being reported to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and detained when paying their ticket. The survey also indicates that three in four service providers responding to the survey have worked with immigrant survivors who have concerns about going to court for a matter related to the abuser/offender. Additionally, 43 percent of advocates indicated that they have worked with immigrant survivors who dropped civil or criminal cases because they were too fearful of ICE and deportation to continue with their cases. This can have serious consequences, because when abuse is not reported or survivors choose not to proceed with a case due to fear, abusers/offenders cannot be held accountable for their actions and are free to abuse/offend again.

Finally, the survey findings showed that 62 percent of respondents observed an increase in the number of immigration related questions that their agencies were receiving from immigrant survivors. I too, have seen an increase in immigration-related questions. I have had a few individuals ask friends to ask me questions regarding immigration, because they are afraid to disclose that they are undocumented. This pattern is not just limited to immigration related questions but also extends to questions regarding survivors of sexual assault and their options regarding working with police. Undocumented survivors have been fearful in the past, but I have noticed it even more in this current climate.

To find out more about our bilingual services please contact me (Annabell Bustillos) at 262-619-1634 ext. 14 or via email at [annabell.bustillos@lsswis.org](mailto:annabell.bustillos@lsswis.org).

—Annabell

Source: 2017-Advocate-and-legal-service-survey-key-findings.pdf



# Making a Difference

By Michelle Englund

## *Self-Care for Survivors*

What is self-care, and how does it affect the lives of survivors of sexual assault? Self-care is about taking steps to feel healthy and comfortable. Whether it happened recently or years ago, self-care can help survivors cope with the short- and long-term effects of a trauma like sexual assault. Self-care is important in everyone's life, but if you are a survivor of trauma the thought of doing something for yourself may be too much to handle. Many survivors may be having a difficult time just trying to complete the tasks of everyday life, such as being able to go back to work or care for their children. As supporters we have to remember, for the survivors, the trauma did not stop with the assault, the SANE exam, or the trial. The trauma may be ongoing. Life does continue, bills still have to be paid, carpools driven, meals cooked, and life lived, but for survivors the thought of just getting out of bed each day can be difficult. The idea of trying to do something to help themselves may seem challenging and almost hopeless, but studies have shown the more we are able to take care of ourselves, the healthier we become - mentally, physically, and emotionally.

According to Dr. Kathleen Young, a Clinical Psychologist specializing in the treatment of trauma, self-care can be challenging for survivors of rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse, but

Cont. on page 5



# Family Advocate

By Christa Dasher

People who have children or those who care about children often wonder how they can help keep them safe from sexual abuse. An online training called Stewards of Children, through an organization called Darkness to Light, helps address this topic. I recently got a chance to complete one of these trainings on the topic of talking to children about safety from sexual abuse and would like to use this article as an opportunity to share what I have learned.

Two basic building blocks of safety help to protect children from sexual abuse. The first is relationships. It is important that children have healthy relationships with people they can trust. Developing an emotional connection to and having consistent involvement from people who care about a child are important parts of the foundation that contributes to that child's safety. The second building block is resilience. Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from challenges and is established through building children's self-esteem, allowing them choices, and providing them with support by letting them know that you believe in them.

You may be wondering, "What things can I do as an adult to help protect children from sexual abuse?" One important step is to start early on teaching children about safety from sexual abuse. Children also need to be educated about the act of sex, and Stewards of Children suggests that this be done by the age of eight. It is important to teach children the proper names for body parts. Penis, vagina, breasts and buttocks are not bad or dirty words, and children need to learn these parts just as much as they learn head, shoulders, knees and toes. We need to teach that there are parts of their bodies that other people should not touch or look at. The phrases "good touch" and "bad touch" should be avoided when teaching children about sexual abuse. They can be confusing to children, as a sexually abusive touch may feel physically good but is still not appropriate. Instead of good and bad, use comfortable and uncomfortable. Most children can understand these feelings regardless of age.

Children should also learn that they should never be asked to keep a secret. Play the "What If" game, and use scenarios and everyday opportunities to talk with children about sexual abuse. Make sure you use examples that include people known to the child (i.e. grandpa, mommy etc.), as most sexual abuse is committed by people that children know and trust in their lives. Additionally, children need to learn about privacy and respecting people's boundaries. They should be told to

respond to their gut instinct. It is also important for them to know that it is ok to say no to adults if something is making them uncomfortable. It is also key to safety to help children identify safe adults in their lives that they can go to if they ever have a problem. This list should consist of a variety of people in different areas of their life (i.e. adults at home, at school, at church etc.).

Another important area to address that relates to safety from sexual abuse is digital safety. In this day and age of constant access to social media, technology, and computers, it is important to discuss this early on. The two key lessons tied to digital safety to address with children are the concepts of public and permanent. They should understand that what they put out there using technology has the potential to be seen by everyone, and that once it is out there it can't be taken back or just erased.

These are just some of the things we can do to help protect the children in our lives from sexual abuse. While nothing is a guarantee, it is important that we do everything in our power to help keep them safe.

—Christa



Cont. from page 1

SAS's 24-hour crisis line (262-637-7233) and also lists some program services such as counseling, support groups, and legal advocacy. The final component of SAS's SAKI grant is funding to provide training to the community. The Racine County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) already organizes a training every two years for professionals involved in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases, but with SAKI funds, SAS will be bringing in an expert speaker on trauma response and victim behavior to enhance this already valuable training. SAS is grateful for these SAKI funds, because they are helping us to continue to shape Racine into a community where survivors of sexual assault are believed and supported and perpetrators are held accountable – in other words, a safer community.

For more information about the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative, you can visit any of the following websites:

- <https://www.sakitta.org/>  
(for information on the national initiative)
- <https://wisaki.doj.wi.gov/>  
(for information on Wisconsin's initiative)
- <http://byyoursidewi.org/>  
(for survivors looking for support and information regarding their own SAK)

—Sam





# Face to Face

By Kari Wilder

Whenever I tell someone that I'm a therapist they joke that I spend all day asking people about their childhood, and to be honest they aren't completely wrong. The reality is that as children, we depend completely on the adults in our lives. Not only do we depend on them for food, shelter, and clothing, but we also learn our life lessons from the adults around us. They are so essential to our survival that we are hardwired as babies to read the body language of our caregivers to determine what is appropriate or inappropriate and effective or ineffective. As children, our primary caregivers are essentially our whole world.

During World War II theorists began studying the impact caregivers have on their children. John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, worked with children impacted by the loss of parental care. He determined that children fall into one of three attachment styles: secure attachment, anxious attachment, or avoidant attachment. A large majority of children attach to their parent or parents securely. These children learn that their needs will be met by their caregivers. This relationship establishes a sort of template that they use to construct their future relationships. Based on their relationships with their caregivers, they learn that the world is essentially a good and safe place, which gives them the confidence to be independent and explore the world. It also provides them with an ability to identify their emotions and self-soothe. On the other hand, children with anxious attachment and avoidant attachment styles have learned that their needs may not be met by their caregivers. Children with avoidant attachment learn that, since they can't rely on their caregivers to meet their needs, they must attempt to meet them themselves. These children learn to avoid developing emotional connections with others. Children with anxious attachment have found their caregivers to be inconsistent and as a result become anxious and fearful because they never know what to expect.

While not all individuals who developed avoidant or anxious attachment styles have abusive caregivers, imagine the impact that abuse and neglect can have on this essential relationship. Not only do these children learn that in some cases their physical needs such as food and shelter may not be met, but they learn that the world is a harsh place. They learn that their caregivers cannot be trusted, can be the source of their pain and distress, and therefore they are unsafe. They may respond by either clinging to their caregiver (anxious attachment) or they learn to soothe and care for themselves (avoidant attachment).

These attachment styles not only impact how these children respond to their environment, but they impact the adults these children become. Attachment style impacts how their brains develop, and as I stated before, creates a template that they use to construct their future relationships. As adults, individuals who developed avoidant attachment styles may appear distant or withdrawn in relationships, and individuals who developed anxious attachment styles may shift from available to withdrawn in relationships.

This does not mean that once an insecure attachment is formed an individual will never have a secure relationship. Children who formed insecure attachments with their caregivers may form secure attachments with teachers or other individuals in their lives which can influence their attachment styles as adults. Therapy can also play a big role in changing attachment styles. Through therapy, clients can develop a working alliance that mimics the attunement and responsiveness they sought from their caregivers. Through therapy, clients can learn to trust, identify emotions, and cope with those emotions effectively. They can find kindness and stability in a world that may have initially been harsh and chaotic.



—Kari

Cont. from page 3

it is also a part of the healing process. Self-care is about doing things for yourself that make you feel good or help you to relax. Self-care does not have to be expensive or scheduled to be productive. In fact five minutes out of the day to drink a cup of tea with no distractions is a method of self-care. This is your mind telling your body it is alright for you just to relax, and you do not have to think about anything at this moment. Some of the other suggestions for self-care include:

- Be creative – sing, dance, draw, or play an instrument
- Cook or bake
- Exercise, take a walk, play with a pet
- Surround yourself with good smells - light candles, bake cookies
- Breathing techniques or meditation
- Keep a journal – many survivors find it helpful to write down their feelings
- Eat your favorite food
- Have your nails done or get a massage

Self-care should never be about self-harming or doing anything that makes a survivor feel vulnerable. Survivors should never feel as though they have to pretend everything is fine or fake a smile. But with help from support people and/or family members, survivors may be able to start taking care of their needs in ways that allow the healing process to begin.

—Michelle

Young, K (2010, November 07). *Self-Care and Trauma Survivors*. Retrieved from <http://drkathleenyoung.worldpress.com>



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24 Hour Crisis Line: 262-637-SAFE (7233)  
Spanish Crisis Line: 262-424-3134  
Website: <http://www.sasoflss.org>

### Stay Connected!



Join our News and Events email update list! Would you like to receive information on upcoming SAS events and volunteer opportunities? Email Samantha Sustachek at [ssustachek@lsswis.org](mailto:ssustachek@lsswis.org) with "SAS news and events" in the subject line and she will include you in all SAS news and events related emails.

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*Sexual Assault Services seeks to create a safe and compassionate environment to help promote the healing of sexual assault survivors and their support people.*

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